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The pronunciation of Hsingan on the Han River and Hsian, the provincial capital in the Wei River basin, is almost identical, and as the Chinese themselves sometimes misunderstand one another when referring to them in conversation, it is rather a hopeless task for the foreigner. The two names are really Hsing-ngan and Hsi-ngan. If one wishes to make certain of being understood one should refer to Hsingan by its old name of Hsingan Chou or its new one of Ank'ang Hsien (not really new as this was always the name of the district), and to Hsian as Hsian Sheng or Ch'angan Hsien.

The American Railway Group, having secured the concession for the construction of a certain mileage of railways in China wherever they could find room between the staked out claims of other Powers, have, according to the newspapers, elected the upper Han valley as one of the scenes of their activities, and propose, it is said, to build a line from Laoho K'ou up the valley of the Han into Shensi, and thence across the mountains into Szechuan. In view of the richness of the country it will tap, and to the fact that it is not unlikely to be the first line to solve the great problem of the railway penetration of Szechuan, the object of so many schemes, this Han Valley Railway constitutes one of the most interesting and attractive of the many railway propositions at present in contemplation in China.

We remained at Hsingan two days, during which it rained incessantly. The climate of the Han valley is rather a treacherous one and fevers are common. We were now bound up the Han basin to Hanchung, a distance of 650 li. The road we followed is the main highway through this region, though much of the way only a mountain footpath eighteen inches wide. Most of the traffic, however, goes by river. Like most of the roads in the Han basin it is really a track for coolie porters, but mules and ponies can travel by it easily enough except for one stage along the Han River beyond Shihch'uan, which is rather dangerous for pack animals. As the main road connecting two such important places as Hsingan and Hanchung it well illustrates the extraordinarily roadless condition of China. Nor in these days of railway construction is it likely that China will ever be provided with roads as the word is understood in other civilized

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the Church, and the hospital, where he daily received men and women patients. At the time of our meeting his position in the city was amply assured, but many years previously the people of Pingliang had combined to refuse him all admittance by forbidding anyone to sell him food, and it was only due to the secret kindness of one woman in supplying him with a meal of flour and water pancakes each day for several months, that he existed at all; but in the end he overcame every opposition, outlived suspicion and came to be regarded with universal respect.

We studied together the map of Kansu, and he told us of his own various itinerant journeys to districts reputed to be almost uninhabited, but where large audiences had collected whenever he made halt to proclaim the Gospel. Laying his finger on a spot at the extreme North-Western boundary of the Province, he said: 'Here stands the Great City of Suchow. You who care so much for Kansu, this is the town which awaits your coming!'

CHAPTER III

THROUGH THE EARTHQUAKE AREA TO LANCHOW

On the second day after leaving Pingliang, we took the Pass which rises to nearly nine thousand feet over the Lupan Shan. All the morning we had followed the course of a rushing stream, which we crossed and recrossed many times. It was still early winter, and the ice was not strong enough to bear the weight of our litters, so that we often had the unpleasant experience

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of breaking through into the water below. On these occasions the driver is always compelled to leave the litter-side, and controls his beasts from a distance by means of shouted directions, enforced by skilfully-thrown stones. A pebble alighting on the mule's nose warns him to back, while one hitting him in the hind-quarters is equivalent to an order to move on. In spite of the undoubted understanding existing between man and beast, there is a moment of extreme nervous tension on the part of the occupant of a litter, when the ice collapses and the startled animal crashes into water of quite uncertain depth. From the moment, however, that we took the well-made road leading over the mountain, the anxieties of the valley were (temporarily) at an end, and we were free to enjoy the fine views which every turn of the road revealed to us. The short-cut downhill was less pleasant, for the road was so steep as to be only just negotiable.

The next few days brought us near to the centre of devastation by the great earthquake of January 1921. The face of the land had been completely altered by the mighty upheaval, and its surface still suggested the semblance of boiling mud suddenly petrified. In one place a mountain had been removed, in another a large lake of brackish water had suddenly appeared. Scarcely a human habitation was to be seen, for the cliffs had overwhelmed all the cave-dwellings which formerly the industry of man had hollowed out. Nevertheless, the road over which we travelled was newly-made, while huts had already begun to appear at intervals. They were poor little places, composed of four mud walls, a mud roof, a mud bed, and a mud trough at the back where a few sheep could be fed, and the children we met were almost naked, in spite of the then extreme cold. A missionary in charge of the relief works assured us

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country. You come from Woman's Land, don't you?' This mythical kingdom, to which she referred, is a fabulous place known by name to all Chinese. Its inhabitants are solely women, and doubtless by virtue of their isolation, they there develop independent and Amazon-like qualities!

We had been accompanied from Yungchang by Mrs. Kao, the wife of the Chinese Missionary already referred to, for she, with two small children, under the escort of one of the Kanchow deacons, had come travelling forward to meet us. The road over which we now passed was varied in character, and presented many interesting features, besides being very rough. The cart alternately bumped over boulders, was dragged heavily up and down sandhills, or squelched its way through semi-solid mud-lakes, and we encouraged each other with the reminder that now, as in the days of the first great missionaries, the work on which we were engaged must of necessity be carried on through hardship and labour, hunger and thirst, in heat and in cold, and in dangers oft from all that lay before us in the Unknown. Our starting-time was never later than 4 a.m., and was often earlier, and in the evening the darkness frequently overtook us still on the desolate expanse far from any habitation. On one occasion, being diverted from the main track simply by reason of its being impassable, we sat for hours leaning back against the Great Wall of China, as our cart was up to the axle in a mud-pit, from which all efforts hitherto had failed to extricate it. There was no hope, therefore, but from the assistance of chance passers-by. At the end of what seemed an interminable time, it was with much relief that we saw, slowly emerging through an opening in the wall, the head and body of an ox, which animal fastened wondering and meditative eyes

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upon us sitting there. And the ox was soon followed by a man riding a donkey, whose spirit apparently so failed at the sight of the mud-pit and ourselves, that after standing for a moment transfixed, it sank peacefully to the ground as if in a state of mental collapse. The rider consequently had no option but to dismount, and come to our assistance, and in a few moments the ox and the ass, together with our own mules, triumphantly drew the cart from the watery depths.

Our next stage lay over sandhills sparsely covered with a scrubby growth. Here, by means of our field-glasses, we were able to follow herds of antelopes, which paused to watch the movements of our cart-wheels with fascinated interest, but which always flee at the approach of a pedestrian. On either side the horizon was bounded by mountain ranges, silhouetted against the deep, blue sky, and on one afternoon the wind blew with terrific force from the Tibetan hills, chilling us to the bone in a blinding cloud of sleet. The strip of land which divides the snowclad Richthofen Mountains from the sandy Mongolian hills was narrowing, so that when we reached Kanchow we were at the point where the two ranges most nearly approach each other. On the last morning of this stage we left our inn at 3 a.m. in the hope of reaching Kanchow early, but by 3 p.m. we began to get into difficulties. The cart was, as usual, in the slough of despond, and we were, as usual, standing by the roadside trying to keep up the family spirits by teaching Mrs. Kao's little girl a finger-game : 'This is a cup, and this is a cup, and this is a pot of tea,' a fictional feast of Couéistic value.

At the moment when our courage reached its lowest ebb, for the short daylight was rapidly waning and there seemed no prospect of extricating the cart, two galloping horsemen appeared on the horizon, and in a

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few moments Dr. Kao swung himself from the saddle, and advanced to meet us with cordial and cheering words. He turned from us to the carter, who, with an abashed grin, acknowledged his presence.

'Hello, Old Sheep!' he exclaimed. 'You out of jail again? That last trip of yours turned out badly.' Then turning to us he said: 'This carter has just finished his third term of imprisonment for destruction of travellers' property, through carelessness. Whatever induced you to hire him? He'll never get in to-night. But we must do so.'

A few swift orders were then given, and the second horseman galloped back to the city for help. Meanwhile as many of the party as could be crowded into our own small cart drove on, while the rest proceeded on foot. The soil formation in and around Kanchow is peculiar. The city is built on a crust of earth covering underground springs. During the period when the water is still frozen the place stands firm, though buildings are thrown out of the perpendicular, but during the spring months the earth trembles and yields under the slightest pressure. On this occasion a thaw had set in, and water was welling up from below the surface, so that the condition of the roads baffles description. We picked our way cautiously over this swampy, unstable district, and where rivers intersected our path, the cart was obliged to take us over in relays. Horsemen now appeared coming to our rescue with galloping steeds, two saddled for riding and two more ready to be hitched to the carts. These fine horses, we were told, belonged to a Mongol Prince, who was staying in Doctor Kao's house.

It was long after sunset when we entered the great gates of Kanchow city. We passed through between the flaring smithies which always ply their trade in the

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596 627 to control him. So great, indeed, was the change in this restored and reinstated prodigal, that twelve months later, when we made a long and arduous journey to distant cities outside the Great Wall, he came with us as our personal carter, and fulfilled his duties with ability. So much for the development of the natural man, under wise and firm discipline, fairly and justly administered; but when the time came for our leaving Kansu, there had still been no evidence of spiritual life. One could not say of him, in the language of St. Paul: '*It is a new creation*'; the Prodigal had left his swine, but had not yet 'come to his Father.'

CHAPTER XIX

A TRIP TO KINTA

494 484 At the end of March, a good many of our students, being obliged to return to their farms for a short period, we, with the remainder of the Band, made a trip in a north-easterly direction to visit Kinta, the only city lying between Suchow and Mongolia. As it was barely thirty miles distant we fully hoped to reach it easily in one day, although it was necessary to take the large cart for the Chinese women, in addition to some heavy loads of books and the tent. It being the first of April, subsequent events were in character with that day, the carter being one of those jolly rascals well known to travellers in China, who combine a sporting instinct with a very plausible tongue! He offered no sort of objection to our weighty baskets, but also took care, we noticed, to line the bottom of the cart with a layer of his own, unspecified, merchandise.

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'A little luggage, more or less,' said he. 'What's that? Look at my team. The best mules in Suchow!' 494

However, on the morning of our departure, the strong animals displayed the day before had disappeared, being now replaced (on account of sudden illness!) by three underfed and skinny mules, whose harness only half-concealed sore backs, yet to which the customary red-paper tickets were affixed, which assured the simple-minded traveller that the average pace was 'one thousand *li* by day, and eight hundred *li* by night.' 484

'The main road is under water,' the driver casually remarked, 'but I know every path in the whole district, and will take you by a route which, although it means *one* night on the journey, will save you from all mud-pits!' We had heard roads were bad, so easily fell into his well-prepared trap, and saw nothing strange in passing the livelong day in a featureless, arid land; but at sunset, a few trees on the horizon showed that we were reaching an irrigated belt, and we drew up before a single, lonely farm nearly surrounded by sand. We had expected an inn, but this house contained only two rooms, in one of which twelve men were sleeping, while the other seemed already overflowing with women and babies! The cart was turned round to shield us from the fierce wind, and we were preparing to spend the night in it, when the women, taking pity on us, made room for us on their *kang*. When the longed-for cup of tea arrived it was painful disappointment to find the water was brackish, so that the more we drank the thirstier we grew. After we had settled for the night, our deceptive carter called outside the window: 'You must rise,' he said, with a merry chuckle, 'at dawn if you wish to get in by nightfall. It is but ten miles, but those miles are long!' Accordingly, before sunrise we started once more on the lonely track and for

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hours travelled on, meeting no one. Once we passed a tiny fragment of humanity, the corpse of a little baby, thrown away by some traveller. Now and again, wherever a slight eminence showed itself, a mound of stones, constructed to look like a human figure, had been erected by the Mongols as an altar to their god. Our chariot wheels drove very heavily, and by common consent we sank into a deep silence, lest conversation should increase our thirst. Towards midday we met a traveller, who genially enquired whither we were wending? 'To Kinta,' was our reply. 'To Kinta!' he exclaimed, leaping up in his seat, 'but you are going in the opposite direction!'

At this juncture our resourceful carter came running up. 'I am taking this road,' he explained, 'to avoid mud-pits,' and with one meaning look he immediately made an accomplice of the stranger, who now in a level voice remarked: 'Certainly *this* way you will find neither mud nor pits,' and promptly drove on. This led us to speak straightly to our deceiver, whose quick wits immediately supplied him with a subterfuge.

'Kinta *city*? That is still a long way off, but your man, who engaged me, said you wanted to preach your religion in Kinta *district*; we shall enter that in a few hours.' Nightfall found us wandering over boggy ground, where various farmsteads dimly outlined themselves against the sky. And here our perfidious guide for once showed his hand. 'I have relations living near here,' he announced, his eyes sweeping the landscape; 'charming people! a good house, too; plenty of room, plenty of fodder; why not spend the night here? So much better than an inn, you know; more like your own home.'

There was no choice but to acquiesce, and in a few minutes (the cart having meanwhile stuck in the

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morass) the whole of the party made its way on foot to a wretched hovel, where on the damp ground, amidst indescribable dirt, we spent the night. Incidentally, we discovered that we were expected at this house; and that the carter was smuggling illicit goods to his friends under cover of our tracts. The next day the mules were changed for oxen. 'There are rivers ahead,' said the man, in a confidential whisper; 'nothing like oxen for crossing water. This, my nephew, (here he indicated a lad of about sixteen) 'understands the fords thoroughly, and he will now take you on for the rest of the way.'

Knowing there could be no danger from rivers at this season of the year, but feeling that we might, at this rate, never reach our destination at all, we accepted the new arrangement, trusting 'Welcome Home' to see us safely through; and late that afternoon, in a snowstorm, we reached Kinta.

It proved to be an interesting place, colonised two hundred years ago by people from Taiyüanfu, in Shansi, and though small, yet from its position on well-watered land of large extent, it is a place of importance.

The Golden Tower, from which Kinta takes its name, is in Indian style, as are also many of the temple frescoes and wooden idols of the cities north-west of Kanchow, showing that at one time Indian art had strongly imprinted its mark in the Province of Kansu. The dome of the tower is said to have originally been covered with pure gold, which was stripped off by the Moslems and replaced by brass; and this having in turn been stolen, the whole tower was subsequently whitewashed, as it is to-day.

In the spring the temples all hold separate festivals in honour of their respective gods, and we were in Kinta when the *Cheng Wang* (protective deity of the

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returned, and the Military Guard of Kiayükwan having bade us 'good-bye and a pleasant journey,' we started off in good spirits; nevertheless, silence soon fell on us when we realised we had turned our backs on China, and were ourselves literally without the Gate.

We were now to learn by personal experience that the cold of the desert nights is only equalled in intensity by the midday heat. Water being unobtainable for very long distances, the strain is too great for the animals during the day, consequently all stages must be taken by night. It was 5 p.m. when the many-storeyed tower of the fortress finally disappeared beyond the horizon, and the undulating expanse of the Gobi was all that was to be seen lying around on every side. Desert travelling is a memorable experience. Immediately after sunset an icy breath steals along the earth's surface, and instantly the carter dons his heavy sheepskin coat. Silence instinctively falls on the party as the twilight swiftly closes in, and the horses settle to a steady stride. Thanks to the telegraph poles with their single wire, we still have *one* link left with the outer world; so we cannot miss our way.

Generally, once in the night, we passed a string of carts from distant Turkestan, or we heard, a good half-hour before they actually appeared, the clang of bells belonging to a caravan of at least fifty camels, which shuffled past us grunting, soon to be swallowed up in the surrounding shadows. Some time in the night we heard the jingle of merry bells peculiar to one traveller, and all would cry out: 'Here come the Mails.' Unlike all other riders, the Courier comes at a sharp canter, his heavily-laden horse in a lather. At each stage a fresh horse and messenger are waiting to carry on the bags. He is always cheerful, always friendly, and full of information. According to his account it is we who are

1 [Between Kiayükwan and Yümen--Analyst]

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The geographical position of the city is such as to render it a very important centre, standing as it does where roads from Lhasa, Mongolia, India and South Siberia all converge. Merchants from Khotan, Yarkand and Kashgar travel this way, and it is not infrequent to meet a caravan of sixty donkeys which have travelled fifty days over the southern border of the Takla-Makan desert. Tunhwang is a town which has, under various names, taken an important place in the history of the territory now known as North-West Kansu. In 165 B.C. there is record of its inhabitants being overcome in battle, and dispersed, reappearing later as the Indo-Scythians of the Punjab. Its more ancient name was Shachow—City of the Sands—and it is frequently marked by this name, on maps, at the present time. In A.D. 400 it was the capital of the State of Western Liang. It has been held by Tibetans, and used by the Chinese as an extreme outpost of defence against the Huns. Documents in the Indian, Khoroshti and Brahmi scripts had been excavated in the district, as well as in an unknown script resembling Aramaic.

Of the original city nothing now remains but a ruined wall, and an enclosure mostly cultivated by market-gardeners. In its stead has grown up a smaller town, on the opposite side of the river, the eastern suburb of which has become the business quarter, and is chiefly occupied by Moslem Turkis, who are now gradually possessing themselves of the land, so that it is common to see the scarlet dress and fluttering veil of the Moslem women at work in the fields. The reason for this change in the population is not far to seek, opium and its deadly influences being the cause. Rich and poor, old and young, farmers, tradesmen and artisans are all neglecting their employment for the opium-pipe, and it is freely admitted that the people

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~~Sinkiang A2-1~~

miserable specimens as to be refused out of hand by the Deacon-in-Charge, without even referring the matter to us. Some owners, however, being very persistent, it soon became necessary for us personally to put in an appearance, to view the lame, blind, aged, bony and sore-backed creatures which presently paraded the compound court in a long, melancholy procession. Some of the worst specimens, however, wore splendid harness and finely-wrought saddles, borrowed for the occasion; but we were not to be taken in by such childish deceptions! Having ourselves already had some experience both in selling as well as in buying, we remained quite unimpressed by the flashily-groomed beast which clattered down the road, urged to a gallop by the owner, who declared himself in despair at having to part with the 'finest mule that Shensi has yet produced,' but which, stripped of its trappings, generally stood revealed as antique and emaciated, and with flanks heaving with exhaustion consequent on such an unusual effort. Nevertheless, one by one, we steadily added to our teams, until nine mules were comfortably champing side by side in the stable. Two large strong carts were next bought and then carefully overhauled in view of the heavy strain ahead. Our own small Peking cart which had already done valiant service was destined to carry us and our bedding, for though this conveyance made no provision for a possible lie-down at night, we yet chose it on account of the easier movement it afforded than the rolling and lurching of the larger vehicles, each of which, covered with matting and lined with felts, and with wheels studded with protruding iron nails, could carry a load of two thousand pounds.

Naturally enough, such preparations needed a considerable supply of ready money, which from the

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~~Sinkiang AF 1~~

he ever know the security of a normal environment until he find it in the ' City that hath the foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.'

As Deacon Chang turned away with tears in his eyes, we knew that he shrank from the responsibilities which must now rest upon him in quite a different way when we were gone, but from the day of our arrival in Kanchow it had been clearly understood by all, that our visit would end with the completion of our immediate task, nor could there be any question of an indefinite prolongation of our sojourn, even though the growing Church might need, and also desire, a similar period of help from the foreign Missionary in the future.

At the hour of leaving there are always hands extended beseeching you to stay, and voices to declare that you were never so much needed as at this hour. It is only too easy at these moments to fall victim to the illusion that the holding together of the members of the Church is the work of man, and to miss the basic fact that the Life-Source which alone will fitly knit them together is the Holy Spirit of God ; nor has this power ever been delegated to any human being.

CHAPTER XXX

A FAIR IN AN OASIS

THE whole territory stretching from the gate of Kiayükwan to the frontier of Siberia is known by the Chinese as Kow Wai—' Without the Mouth.' To the Chinese it carries the impression of enforced exile, as though the land of China had spued an unwanted national from her mouth. The thought of a journey in ' Kow Wai ' suggests terrors to the heart of every

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~~Sinkiang AF 1~~

494 Chinese. It was perhaps owing to this that one of our three carters sent a relative on the eve of our departure to inform us that his '*Mama* was not well, and he would be needed at home.' The substitute was a Christian youth who undertook to do his best for us, but by the close of the first day it became evident that he was not adequate to his job. The handling of a team of obstinate Chinese mules requires a knowledge of animal psychology such as can only be acquired by living as an animal with your animals for all the years of your own psychological development. The mules are harnessed without reins, and are almost entirely driven by word of mouth. One sound means 'Water ahead,' another, 'Keep to the right,' a third 'Your foot is in the traces, wait till I get you free.' A fourth conveys the following information: 'You villain! If you do that again, when we get to the inn to-night I shall kill you, and spend a merry night eating your flesh boiled and fried!' Our young man's psychology was insufficient.

The problem at once presented itself as to where a driver could be found to take on his post, for the road is no place to pick up carters of sufficient responsibility to be trusted, as they must be, with the handling of goods and grain. At the first inn, however, was a decent man known to some of our party, who was transporting a band of his womenfolk to the town of Yümen. Modes of transit had utterly failed him, and there he was, unable to move, spending money which he did not own. He had sent home for help, but the days were going by and no one appeared. He could come with us, but for the women and children for whom he was responsible.

As we were discussing the situation, in walked two youths with a few donkeys. It was the rescue party, which after such long delays had at last arrived to fetch the women. With gratitude, accordingly, our

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~~Sinkiang Ai 1~~

new acquaintance took over our job, and the same evening we proceeded on our way. The coincidence of events which released him at the very moment when we required his services, and also put lucrative work in his hands, so impressed him as to make him exclaim at frequent intervals: 'Ai ya! That was a strange bit of luck! We shall get on all right on *this* journey. Fortune favours these Christians!'

Our direct route lay from south-east to north-west, but some important oases lay direct north and south of the main road, and we were determined to visit these very isolated localities, even though we were warned that in so doing we should add considerably to our fatigue.

Our first détour, then, was to Chikinpu, a little castellated fortress-town, where we were met with the news that every person had gone into the country to attend a famous annual fair and theatrical performance, in a temple five miles distant. Fairs and theatres are the preacher's opportunity, so we said we would go a-fairing too! It was a long stage under the midday sun before we reached the Temple of the Red Hill, where we sat by the roadside until the big carts lumbering behind overtook us. When travelling, our personal luggage was wrapped in a length of waterproof canvas, and on such occasions as this we were able by means of three sticks to transform it into a tiny tent, which provided a shelter in the shadow of which we spread our bedding. The spot was very attractive, for it supplied a bubbling spring, and near by there was a field of celandines on which to rest our sun-scorched eyes. We were now only a few miles from the lower ranges of the Tibetan hills, on which patches of shade were thrown by the passing clouds. To the back of us was a red sandstone cliff, which gave its name of Hung Shan to the temple. Farms were dotted over the landscape, each of which

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~~Sinkiang-Al-1~~

more we prepared to enter on a stage which was completely new to us, and which we were warned held difficulties greater than any which we had already faced.

CHAPTER XXXII

VIEWING BLACK GOBI

EACH afternoon of our stay at Ansi we wandered out through the North Gate to a little bridge which spanned the irrigation canal, and looked over the limitless expanse of grey grit mixed with small black pebbles, across which the next stage of the journey must be taken. This was Black Gobi, a plain so windswept as to have lost its sandy surface, which has been carried away by the gales and deposited elsewhere. When the hour of our departure arrived and our carts rolled out by that same North Gate, leaving behind us the last city of Kansu, we knew that we must prepare ourselves for a series of arduous stages, and that we should not see another walled town until we reached Hami. It was 5.30 p.m. when we left the inn, and though we had tried to make it an easy day, the number of callers had added to the inevitable fatigue of repacking, and we were weary before we started. As soon as we were out of the oasis we realised that the black, gritty surface was not as resisting as we had hoped, and the cart-wheels dragged heavily from the first.

Three miles from the town gate we passed a temple, and as was our custom got down from the carts in order to visit it, as well as the priest in charge. To our surprise we found the door fastened from within by a heavy stone, and were unable to get an answer to our knocking and calling. Our carters refused to be balked

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~~Sinkiang AI-1~~

778 by a disobliging priest, and between them succeeded in dislodging the boulder. We entered a spacious and well-kept temple-court containing a well, by the side of which stood a bucket and well-rope. We passed from shrine to shrine without discovering any sign of life, but a few moments later a call from one of the men brought us to a little outhouse, where we found the guardian lying on his *kang* in the grip of raging fever, too weak to move, and being quite alone, had no means whatever of communication with the city. All that our men could do was to draw a bucket of water, which with a few loaves of bread we left within his reach, and later on, when we passed the postman, we sent a message back to the Ansi postmaster telling him of the priest's predicament, and begging for help to be sent.

133 We travelled all the night, and dawn found us at a landmark where a few arid mounds broke the landscape.
● 494 The place was called Siyaotz—'Four Caves'—the
491 name indicating four caverns which had been hollowed in the hillside, such as might serve to save a traveller's life in the event of high winds or blizzards. There was no point in delaying here more than a few moments to breathe the animals, which were already showing signs of fatigue, although we had accomplished little more than half our stage. But there is no possibility of delay on these hard marches, for the energy produced by the last feed soon ebbs, and consequently the Gobi roads are all marked by the bleaching bones of mules and camels, abandoned by their owners when too exhausted to keep up with the caravan.

The second half of the journey was now made doubly hard by the burning rays of the sun, added to which the grit was looser than before, so that after each short pull of twenty steps the flagging animals would stand still, needing to be urged again and again to make fresh

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efforts. The road here was also quite deserted, as the rigid policy of the Governor had closed it to travellers, and the caravans which normally move up and down this trade-route had vanished. Once, however, we passed a pedestrian, who begged us, as though asking for gold, that we would grant him a drink of water, which of course we did, and afterwards at 10 a.m., thrown across the line of cart-ruts, we came upon the body of another man. A low stick supporting a little bundle of sheepskin threw a patch of shade over his head and served as a signal to passers-by. At first it was not evident if he were dead or alive, but one of the men raised him by the shoulders, whereupon he opened his eyes and murmured, 'A drink of water and I am your slave for life!' We held a cup to his lips, and when he had drunk he somewhat revived, and begging for more, repeated, 'Your slave for life!' We were still many miles from our destination, and our head carter called us aside. 'The man is dying,' he said; 'he is too weak to walk; we can spare neither water nor time. We must press on or we shall lose our mules.' The Christian men were desirous to help, but they also reminded us that if we took him on with us he might die, and thereby involve us in certain complications.

'Nothing will induce us to leave a dying man to his fate!' was our answer; and then seeing that the poor fellow was unable even to stand on his feet, we made room for him in the front of our own cart, while we took it in turns to walk so that the load need not be increased.

At 1.30 p.m. our mules sighted a few blades of green grass, and realising that water was at hand, Molly first gave the signal, lifting her head with a loud neigh! Every beast then summoned its dwindling store of energy, and a few minutes later we pulled into the inn court. The innkeeper at once took our sick man to

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his own room and cared for him, and the subsequent doings of the day for the remainder of the party are best described in the words of the diary, written at the time: 'Ate, slept, got up, and ate again; then back to bed for the night.'

The oasis of Petuntz—'White Tower'—formed a green patch in the arid surroundings. A delightful-looking stream gushed from the cliff and ran into a tiny canal which watered a patch of wheat and a small field of the opium-poppy in full bloom, which raised in us the hope for vegetables, but we found the water to be too alkaline to permit their growth. This property of the water we had, however, already discovered for ourselves, for our first instinct on arrival had been to run to the crystal spring and drink deeply from it; it was, however, a most disappointing experiment, so that here we had to take our first lesson in self-control as regards drinking, for the advice of experienced travellers is: 'Where the water is brackish, drink the least possible, as the more you drink the more parched will be your mouth!' It was now we learnt the bitter lesson that that delicious beverage known to us as 'tea' became in these places only a noxious infusion of tannin which left our lips dry, cracked and black. We found the only palatable way of dealing with desert water was to boil dough-strings in it, the flour and water absorbing the salts. We also, as well as all other caravans, carried certain drugs to administer to the mules as required, serious illness being frequently caused by their inability to assimilate the unaccustomed qualities of the water, human beings, however, as well as beasts who spend long periods in these parts, become at length accustomed to it, and cease to notice its bitterness.

The life of the few families forming these settlements

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is dreary beyond words. The visit of a traveller is their only touch with the outer world, and though in ordinary times and at certain seasons the caravans pass to and fro in large numbers, yet there are many months of wintry weather when there is scarcely a human being on the road. No wonder, then, that their most valued possession is the harvest reaped from the field of opium, which supplies them with their sole luxury of life. Here, as in every other place, we visited each family, sat with them, talked with them, proclaimed Christ as Saviour and King, and on leaving saw to it that each family had now some Christian literature, which we hoped would be read during the long and dreary Gobi winter days and nights. Also before we left Petuntz we had an interesting interview with the man whose life we had saved. We found him to be only twenty-eight years of age, a native of Hangchow in Shensi, very well educated, and also that he had with him sufficient money for all his expenses, having come to 'Kow Wai' hoping to secure a good post. His gratitude to our party knew no bounds, and the villagers kept reiterating to him how lucky he was to have been picked up, as during these weeks when the roads were almost deserted, already several pedestrians had been found dead from thirst.

We left at sunset for the next stage, which was to Hungliuyüan—'The Park of Tamarisks'—a charming though deceptive name, and we reached it over ground which by night could have been mistaken for snowfields, the alkali deposit lying in a thick crust on the surface and making it soft and spongy. There were only four souls in Hungliuyüan, namely, one man employed as courier by the post-office, and a woman and her two sons. Of the three inns, two had been abandoned by their owners, who found they could make

[1] [Residents of Petuntz -- Analyst]

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no profit under the present conditions.[1] A petition had been addressed by the innkeepers to the Governor, bringing to his notice the fact that unless they were granted a sufficient government subsidy, they, too, would return to the city, in which case the road would become impassable to travellers, there being no one left to collect the necessary fuel for their use, nor anyone to keep the well clear of sand. In this locality we were among low, bare hills of a dark and threatening appearance. They were formed of a rock of a deep purple colour, their surface being covered with loose fragments which were constantly breaking away under the influence of the weather, and the ridges presented a sharp, spiked outline. We observed also traces of a greenish granite, while in places the ground was covered with small pieces of white porphyry which looked as though a slight snowstorm had fallen.

Our next stopping-place was Tachüan—'Great Spring'—and from thence we came on to Malienking—'The Iris Well.' We here had been overtaken by a party of travellers from the province of Honan, an official hurrying to Kuche on the Kashgar road, to take over the seals of office from a Mandarin who was seriously ill. For several days we kept together, greatly to our advantage, as Mr. Yüan had excellent animals and was travelling very light, so that at each stage he got ahead of us and kindly gave warning of our arrival, with instructions that a room should be swept for us and fodder prepared for the animals. On several occasions this courteous gentleman slept in his cart in order that we might have the use of the only guest-room, and each day he and his suite joined us at family worship (his tall Moslem carter standing on the fringe of the little group, signifying his approval as we read the Scriptures), all reverently bowing in prayer

[1] [Restricted travel, see p. 187--Analyst]

491 661 Here, as in Lanchow fu, the sum set aside since ancient times by the imperial government for bridge repairs has played a certain part in the income of the hsien of Hsining. The city lies in the far west of China proper. And China represents the world to its inhabitants as well as its rulers. Therefore, outside the west gate of Hsining - as every child in the city knew - lay the tien bien yüe ya kiao, that is, the bridge which officially connects the earth with the moon. Now, no one can blame the holders of the honorable post of hsien for annually pocketing the monies with which, by royal decree, they are supposed to keep this important bridge in repair. But I was shown at least one stone which is supposed to have at one time been the beginning of the bridge. From here the way leads to the Hsi tien, the "western heaven," as Tibet is referred to by many Buddhists.

231 494 Another peculiarity of the city of Hsining is the enormous number of ponies which its inhabitants keep. There are surely several thousand of them. Almost everyone has his pony and everyone setting out on a journey, every cobbler or apprentice, rides horseback. Feed is cheap and the price of ponies not high. And if one is not too particular, one can buy up quite a number of ponies in a rather short time. In this respect Hsining is a favorable starting point for a journey into Tibet, and that is why I again looked it up. Nevertheless, it took me a whole week to buy three good ponies. During this time I had ten Chinese women at my inn sew a large servants' tent for me. Carpenters, saddlers, shoemakers, smiths were engaged to complete my equipment. There was nothing in stock, everything had to be ordered. I had to bargain endlessly for every single object. For every button or piece of rope, for every little thing ten times its value was boldly demanded, laboriously I was obliged to bargain it down to a normal price, and if a day later I bought a duplicate, the tiresome haggling began again. Besides, there were so many things I wanted which I could not get. For instance, I had great trouble in that big city finding three pieces of wood which could be used as tent poles. The region has extremely little wood. After we had spent days looking in vain for a piece that would serve as a ridge pole, the son of the general finally took what I needed out of the arsenal and gave it to me.

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Anyone wishing to travel in China should first of all tuck patience into his traveling bag. A Chinese must never be allowed to notice that you are in a hurry for a thing. In Hsining fu, also, all trade, whether in the open market or in shops, is carried on